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THE PROFESSIONAL APPROACH

A. R. Spillers

Forestry is an established profession. The public accepts foresters as professional men. We have established professional precepts. It is essential that we put them into practice. The public expects us to do so. I assume that all professional foresters believe in these precepts but have noted that some of us forget them.

In my job as Director of the Cooperative Forest Management Program, I see many foresters at work in the woods and with the public, especially the service or farm foresters. There are now 285 service foresters and their number is growing. Consequently I am on the lookout for any possible improvement which will make their work more effective. From experience, I believe that this is your view, too.

After 20 years experience with the CFM Program I am convinced that one thing we should make sure of at this time is that all foresters, especially the service foresters and others for whom we are responsible, are by now maintaining the professional approach in representing the profession before the public. For this reason I am passing on the following experience, modified only moderately from the facts, in the event you might have some case in which it might be useful.

On a recent training trip in one of the States (not Oklabama) with the State Forester we visited a service forester. Let's call him Joe Slipping. (That isn't his name and if any forester is named Joe Slipping, I don't mean you.) Forester Slipping was a graduate of an accredited forestry school and had had several years of experience but he was failing in his job as service forester.

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Slipping was a sub-typical or sub-average service forester. Most of them are effective, efficient and doing a swell job. His records showed he was only working with 20 or 30 landowners per year while he should have been reaching 100 which is the average for men in his position. In contrast to most service foresters who have a large backlog of requests for technical assistance from landowners, Slipping had none. Something was wrong, plenty wrong.

The State Forester and I looked over Slipping's office. Everything official was in excellent order. The project map was up-to-date. The files and correspondence and reports were fine. I noticed, however, no personal or unofficial additions to his office - no textbooks, no diploma on the wall and no eye-catching exhibits.

The State Forester and I asked Slipping to show us his latest marking job. We went to a small woodland he had marked recently. He had done a good marking job but said he didn't know whether landowner Smith would follow through and cut or sell the marked timber.

As closely as we could reconstruct the scene it was something like this. Slipping had visited the landowner because the County Agent had told Slipping that Smith had some timber he wanted to cut or sell and Smith asked for some forestry assistance.

At the agreed upon time Slipping met Smith at Smith's house and the two walked over to the woodland. On the way over to the woods they had talked about baseball and the weather. To make this reasonably circumstantial, let's say that Slipping forgot or didn't think to find out anything about Smith. Such things as Smith's physical and mental capabilities, economic status, and experience are important factors. Slipping didn't

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notice that the fence posts were rotted out and that the barn needed rebuilding, so he had no idea of Smith's own needs for the products of the woodland.

At the edge of the woods, Slipping leaned up against a tree with his hands in his pockets and said, "Pretty good stand of pine." Smith, the owner knew that. Without walking further, Slipping pronounced, "Needs thinning." Smith believed that, too, but he would have been interested in knowing why and how much. Slipping had left his increment borer, scale stick and prism in the car. Proper use of these tools would have aided the forester in making decisions and would have convinced the landowner that the forester was backing his decision with more than guesswork or personal opinion.

Slipping offered, "If you want to make a sale, I'll mark your trees."

Smith had planned to ask about markets but by this time he had figured he knew as much as the forester. So he merely said, "Okay, go ahead," and he went back to his porch to spend an interesting morning reading the paper while Slipping marked his trees. Slipping lacked the professional approach. Consequently he failed to win the landowner's confidence and interest.

I told the State Forester and Slipping a lesson that was taught me by that Dean of all Farm Foresters, Charlie Goetzen of Milwaukee, now retired from the Forest Service. One day while noticing a forester, who lacked the professional approach, Goetzen made a point with something like this:

"You're a professional man, like a doctor. Think how a good doctor operates. Let me give you an example. The other day my grandson, Johnny,

age 5, woke up sick. It looked like measles. My daughter rushed to phone Dr. Jones. From the way daughter described Johnny, Doc knew it was measles. He also knew all the kids in town had measles, but he said, 'Sit tight, daughter, I'll be over as soon as I can get loose from all the patients in the outer office.' (There were none there I'll bet, but daughter was impressed.)

"Two hours later Doc drove up. He was shaven and neat. He had his little black bag of 'tools'. He came in, asked questions, and hurried to Johnny's bedside. Doc didn't say 'measles', quick like. Doc asked Johnny questions and seemed to be thinking profoundly. He took Johnny's pulse, temperature, listened to his heart and peered down his throat. Then, after dire deliberation, Doc said, 'This child has measles'. He wrote a prescription in Latin, gave daughter instructions and advised her to phone him the next day. At the end of the month daughter received a bill for \$10 which she gladly paid. She had obtained professional assistance."

Slipping caught the point to the Goetzen story so we sat on a log and discussed how he could develop the professional approach.

We started with the office and made these suggestions:

- (1) Hang up your diploma. You are a graduate forester. It means something to you and will impress your callers. Your visitors will know that you spent years acquiring knowledge that may prove helpful to them.
- (2) Hang up your Membership in the Society of American Foresters' Certificate. This also will impress your callers that you are accepted by your professional colleagues.

- (3) Bring in your technical books and arrange them so that they can be seen by your callers as well as referred to by you. (Incidentally, I know one state forester who won't hire a service forester unless he has all his college technical books.)
- (4) Keep a neat shelf of journals, periodicals, bulletins, leaflets and hand-out printed matter.
- (5) Have a few interesting pictures and exhibits such as the cross section of a fast growing tree, wood samples, cones, tools, etc. Keep these clean of dust, and modern.

Next we talked about personal appearance and attitude and suggested:

- (1) Look like a professional forester. If the State has a prescribed uniform wear it proudly especially in meeting the landowner. Later in marking timber you can change to "fatigues" or "something that should have been discarded".
- (2) Be shaven and as neat as you can at all times. The days when foresters felt they had to look like hayseeds or lumberjacks, chew tobacco and drink corn liquor, to be accepted are long past.
- (3) Understand and like the people you're working with.

Remember, people are much the same everywhere. Remember the story about the filling station operator who was asked by a family seeking a new location, "How are the people around here?"

The station operator asked, "How were the people where you lived before?"

The itinerant family all exclaimed, "Why, back home they're all terrible. That's why we left."

The station man said, "People are like that around here." So the family moved on.

The next family that stopped by looking for a place, in answer to the station man's question about the folks at home said, "They're fine people. We hated to leave, but we did because we lost our jobs."

This time the station man said, "Stop here, folks. They're good people around here and we'd like to have you. I'll help you find jobs."

Next we talked to Slipping about the approach at the landowner's house. We suggested that he find out all the useful information possible. Without appearing too inquisitive he should ascertain:

- (1) The owner's mental and physical capabilities. These will determine how far he can go in helping himself.
- (2) The owner's financial status. This will affect the management of his timber. He may need a sacrifice timber sale or he may be able to make long-term investments in planting and TSI.
- (3) The owner's possible use of his own forest products. Has he need for fuel wood, fence posts, and construction lumber? If he can provide for these needs from his own woodland he'll save a lot of money.
- (4) The status of the landowner's family. What are his plans for putting the kids through school? Is he interested in building an estate or inheritance for his children or grandchildren? Is he interested in protecting himself from inflation? (Remember growing timber is one of the best "hedges" against inflation for it can be made to grow in price as well as volume).

At last we talked about the professional approach in the woods and made these suggestions:

- (1) Don't stop at the edge of the woods. Walk into it and take the landowner with you.
- (2) Don't make snap judgments. Look at the trees before you recommend thinning.
- (3) Use your tools. Bore a few trees to see and show the landowner how they are growing. Use your prism to check the basal area. Get some idea how the stand compares with others you've experienced before you start making recommendations.

Use your scale stick and tables to figure out and show the landowner that, for example: This 10-inch loblolly pine has one log and scales only 16 ft. b.m. Doyle rule and that, if kept for 5 years, it will be a 12 inch two log tree with a volume of 54 board feet - an increase of from 48¢ to \$1.62 (at \$30 per M) etc., etc. That, the landowner will understand.

- (4) Talk about markets and income possibilities. Show an interest in his plans and ideas. Maybe the landowner can log the timber himself. If so, explain methods and possibilities. Don't forget safety precautions. Maybe the landowner wants to clear the land for pasture. Maybe he'll make more money in milk than timber on the land. Show him what his forestry possibilities are in dollars and cents. Use your stand-analysis system to convince him.
- (5) Don't walk off leaving him with a simple rule of thumb such

as "sell all trees down to 12" on the stump." If you think forestry is as simple as that you've wasted 4 years in college.

- (6) Don't attempt to have all the answers. Call in a specialist where needed. (Doctors do.) Get additional information from the Research Center if needed. Call in the higher authorities where needed. Rely on your colleagues. Where industry foresters offer free service call them in to help on appropriate jobs. By all means, when the landowner is sold on forestry and has a sizable job, recommend two or three consulting foresters. Tell him how they can help him make more money.

Service Forester Slipping caught the significance of these suggestions as to how he could develop the professional approach. He was a smart man with good training and experience. But he was failing in his job and his record was far below that of the average service forester. Like many of us he hadn't given much thought over the last few years to developing his professional approach. He promised to try the suggestions and keep them in mind. I believe he will. I am confident that the next visit will find that both he and his record are improving by the use of the professional approach. Most of our service foresters are using it. Slipping is not a typical forester. But, maybe, we all need to stop and look at ourselves. If we are foresters we owe it to ourselves and to our calling to be sure we are using the professional approach.



